

# Freeze, I'm Not Dead

**It may seem incredible, but a number of people have signed up to have their bodies frozen after death in the hope of being thawed and brought back to life some day.**

## **EUROFILE:CHOI TUCK WO**

WITH the Qing Ming (Chinese All Souls Day) Festival drawing to a close, the question of life after death must have been as bizarre as the paper houses and hell currency notes burnt as offerings for the departed ones.

And for those who believe in the prospect of immortality, it may even signal the death knell of funeral services; after all, they're intending to come back one day.

Well, it's one thing talking about living forever over a glass of wine, but it's quite another going down that road. Not in the present time anyway but perhaps, some time in the future, as far as Cryonics Europe is concerned.



Death is not the end: A 'patient' being lifted to a cryostat tank at the Cryonics Institute in Michigan. — Picture courtesy of Cryonics Institute.

For the institute's "patients" – they prefer to be called that way – have no intention of dying; they're merely taking a "break" between life cycles.

Welcome to the Cryonics world of resurrection, where bodies are frozen after death in the belief they'll be thawed out and brought back to life one day.

Say what you like but this is not sci-fi; it's real life. Or, more appropriately, death.

Not that the Cryonics members believe this is the end. They're just waiting with what they regard as the "mostly dead" for their second lives to begin.

"Yes, it's only a small chance but it's a huge gamble," said the institute's media manager Chrissie de Rivaz ([www.cryonics.org](http://www.cryonics.org)).

And surprise, surprise! It has emerged that a Malaysian is among its 70-odd members, with the rest being Britons.

In all probability, the person could be the only Malaysian who has placed enormous faith in cryonics (the word derives from cryogenics, meaning the physics of extreme cold).

Like the other members, they were convinced that if they were frozen carefully and quickly soon after their deaths, their bodies could be maintained indefinitely until science found a cure for whatever illnesses that claimed their lives.

When that time comes, they hoped future generations would be able to take them out of cryogenic suspension, thaw them out, jump-start their brains, restore their memories and repair the damage the Cryonics team inflicted as they prepared their bodies to be frozen.

### **Passport to immortality**

It is, nevertheless, tempting to dismiss these people as eccentrics; after all, how could you ever reconstitute a soul?

Yet the Cryonics headquarters in Michigan and its Arizona-based competitor, Alcor Life Extension Foundation, have a combined total of over 1,000 members, plus hundreds of corpses frozen in giant communal cryostat tanks.

Indeed, Chrissie is a living example of those who simply loved life so much that they've stopped worrying about death.

At first sight, the 67-year-old retired teacher from Cornwall comes across as an ordinary, down-to-earth, jolly blonde mother of three. That's until you catch a glimpse of the silver bracelet jangling on her wrist, engraved with the crucial message that reads: "Reward. Whole body donor. If dead, push 40,000 international units heparin intravenous (an anti-blood clotting agent) and do cardio-pulmonary resuscitation while cooling with ice. Do not freeze, autopsy or embalm. Contact numbers on the back."

This is, in effect, the passport to immortality that Chrissie, her husband John and the other members wear at all times.

In the event of sudden death, the numbers on their bracelets will contact a mobile team of volunteer body freezers who will race to the member's house as quickly as possible.

They will pack the still warm body in ice before loading the "patient" into its ambulance of the future – a specially-adapted white van equipped with a cooling mechanism and a heart and lung machine to start pumping glycerine into the body.

Most of the bodies are sent to the funeral director's home in Rotherhithe, East London, for the initial cooling procedure before being shipped to the United States.

"Once the body reaches our institute in Michigan, it will undergo a final process where its temperature is reduced to  $-196^{\circ}\text{C}$ ," said Chrissie, whose institute has helped freeze one Briton and five other Europeans over the years.

Next, the corpse is zipped into a sleeping bag and lowered, head first, into a 3m communal cryostat tank of liquid nitrogen, alongside a couple of other bodies and even a pet or two.

### Playing God

Chrissie said they charged members about £30,000 (RM210,000) including transport fees, which she insisted was a “small price for a second life”.

“There’s nothing to lose. And you could easily spend that much on smoking and drinking in quite a short time,” she added.

Realistically, she felt the process could work given the present era of frozen sperms, regenerated kidneys and designer babies.

Chrissie also dismissed critics’ claims of likening the technology needed to reanimate dead bodies to the process of trying to turn a hamburger back into a cow.

“That’s ridiculous. If you deep-freeze a steak, it’ll come out again looking pretty much the same as when it first went in when thawed,” she said, adding “we’re more like pieces of steak than hamburgers”.

But even if we ignore the scientific and practical implausibilities of cryonics and future life, isn’t the whole idea of meddling with death and life itself tantamount to playing God?

Chrissie, of course, has a ready answer: “God gave us the gift of life and taught us to preserve it. That’s what we’re trying to do.”

On what she’ll do when she returns as a “second lifer”, she replied: “I’ll be able to write a very accurate historical novel about the 21st century.”

*Choi Tuck Wo is Editor, European Union Bureau, based in London*